

Belleville
S. side of North River
W. of Belleville Creek
Ware Neck vicinity
Gloucester County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-994

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37-WARNE.Y
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BELLEVILLE

HABS No. VA-994

Location: South side of North River west of Belleville Creek, Ware Neck Vicinity, Gloucester County, Virginia.

Present Owner: Action - Oldsmobile, Cadillac, Inc.

Present Occupant: Joe S. Williams

Present Use: Residence

Significance: Belleville is located on one of the earliest land grants in America. It was formerly the home of the Taliaferro and Booth families. The site has been used for a homesite continuously over its three hundred year history, as the house developed from a simple brick cottage to a large T-shaped house.

Along the shores of the Mobjack Bay, and its four estuaries, the Severn, the Ware, the North, and the East Rivers developed those counties known as Gloucester and Matthews. This area is bordered on the south by the waters of the York River and on the north by the Rappahannock River. The proximity of the Mobjack Bay to the early Virginia settlements led to its early exploration. In 1646, a peace treaty with the Indians of the area opened the Mobjack Bay country to English settlement. The waters surrounding Gloucester and Matthews Counties facilitated the transportation of goods and people and soon this area became a center of colonial life.

Among the early land grants of this English colony was a land grant to Major Thomas Curtis in 1642. An additional parcel of 670 acres was granted to Major Curtis in 1652. Included in this parcel is that piece of land believed to be the site of "Belleville". In the patent for the land it is described as being "on the S side of North R. beginning at a lone pine and running S by the bay side to a branch and up same to the E corner tree of Basses Creek devident and along same W to the Back Creek down said creek to the river and northerly 168 poles to the lone pine first specified." The land was passed from Thomas Curtis and his wife, Avarilla to their son John Curtis who in 1661 sold the property to Thomas Morris, Sr. In 1686, the land was passed from Thomas Morris, Jr. to his son James Morris and in 1693, James Morris sold the property to his son-in-law, William Morris.

A few years previous to this last transaction, around 1690, Thomas Booth of Lancastershire, England moved to America, and settled in Ware Parish. It is uncertain where Thomas Booth spent his first years in America. Perhaps he settled with a relative, John Booth, who is believed to have owned land on the Ware River around 1675. According to the Booth family papers, inbetween 1705 and 1720, Thomas Booth began to acquire land, including the parcels of the original Curtis grant. One of these parcels is believed to have contained the site of Belleville. For the next hundred years, Belleville was to be the home of the Booths.

It is unknown whether a house existed on this site when Booth acquired the land. Some sources say a house was built as early as 1658. Most sources

agree that the part known as the "kitchen" and the original brick cottage date from the 1600's. In a deed of 1693, reference is made to a "parcel of land together with all houses, orchards, and woods". This would indicate that a dwelling did exist at this time and was probably located along the river, as were most of the homes at that time.

During this time, Thomas Booth married Mary Cooke, daughter of Mordecai Cooke of Ware Parish and had children, among them three sons. They were Mordecai, Thomas, and William. Of the three sons, it appears that Mordecai inherited the land on the North River. From the Booth family papers, it is evident that Mordecai continued to acquire more lands in Ware Parish, including properties belonging to the Thomas Morrisses and Richard and Augustine Ransone. Mordecai married Joyce Armistead, daughter of William and Ann Lee Armistead of Hesse, and from her family inherited 550 acres situated on the south side of the North River in Ware Parish. Some sources believe that a fire destroyed the original Belleville at this time, and the wealthy Mordecai built an imposing H-shaped mansion on the site of the ruin. Legend goes that this mansion burnt shortly after it was built and that the brick portion of the existing house is what remains of that mansion. This story seems unlikely in view of most sources. It is more probable that Mordecai's wealth led to the addition of a frame wing on the brick cottage. It is thought that the oldest part of the frame addition may have been added around this time.

George Booth, the oldest son of Joyce and Mordecai, inherited the Belleville land. George Booth married Mary Hanson Wythe and they had a son, George L. Booth, Jr. Both father and son appear on the 1782 tax list of Gloucester County. Between the two of them, they owned at this time 1777 acres, 325 negroes, 23 horses, and 165 cattle, making them one of the wealthiest families in the area. George Booth, Jr. married Lucy ?, and they had three daughters who were Mary, Lucy Ann, and Frances Amanda. George Booth, Jr. provides us with the first document on the house. In 1802, he assumed a policy with the Mutual Assurance Company for the house and kitchen at Belleville. In the policy, the dwelling house was insured for \$2400. It consisted of "a brick dwelling house 42 feet by 20 feet one story high and a wooden wing 38 feet by 20 feet one story high underpinned with brick." "A brick kitchen 30 feet by 20 feet one story high" was insured for \$200.

The appraisers for the 1802 record were Benj. Dabney of King and Queen and E. Balentine. In 1805, George Booth renewed his Mutual Assurance policy on Belleville. The dimensions of the buildings are given as the same as the 1802 form. This 1805 form does not state the number of stories but says the brick and wooden walls were covered with wood(shingle). On this policy, a porch 20 feet by 6 feet is located on the west end of the frame wing. The dwelling was insured at \$2670 and the kitchen at \$200. The final Mutual Assurance policy on Belleville is not dated, but must have been between 1813 and 1815 since Thomas Jones, whose signature appears on the document, was the special agent during these years. The policy states that the property is occupied and insured by "Lucy B. Booth, widow of & Tenant in Dower of Geo. W. Booth". The policy is signed by "L. B. Booth and Peter Wiatt, Guardⁿ of Mary E. Booth, Frances A. Booth, and Lucy Ann Booth, infants(offn^s) of Geo. W. Booth Dec^d". At this time, the dwelling is insured for \$2500 and the kitchen for \$200. The form states "this half built of brick and one story high with 2 chimneys, 42 feet long by 20 feet wide underpinned with brick. A Brick Kitchen with a Dutch roof." The sketch on this policy also shows a 12 by 12 foot porch off the brick wing on the east side, stairs in the porch on the frame wing, chimney and closet locations, and a one room addition with fireplace and exterior door to the kitchen. Sketched on the site plan is a long row of L.(lombardy) poplars. The appraisers were Rich^d Singleton and Walker Jones. Of the three daughters born to George and Lucy Booth, only Frances Amanda, or "Fannie", survived. Frances married W. T. Taliaferro, son of W. B. Taliaferro of Church Hill, and thus after over a hundred years, Belleville passed from the Booth family to the Taliaferro family.

Warner Taliaferro and Frances Amanda had one son, William Booth Taliaferro, who was later Major General Booth who fought in three wars. Frances died when her son was young and two years later, Warner Taliaferro married Leah Seddon of Fredericksburg, a young girl of 15. She was the daughter of Susan Alexander and Thomas Seddon, and her brother, James A. Seddon was Secretary of War of the Confederate States. Despite her youthfulness, she must have been a woman of notable character. In the book, Virginia Gardens, it tells about Leah Seddon Taliaferro's gardens at Belleville.

For seventy years she remained its mistress, and it was during that period that the garden and grounds of Belleville were laid off and developed.

There were two special features to be considered:

First--The river which at Belleville sweeps around the grounds in such a manner as to make it nearly a peninsula. Mrs. Taliaferro, unusually gifted with taste and judgement, used this as a basis to work upon. On the broad lawn in front and on one side of the house, she had planted singly and in groups trees which are still standing in their strength. Among them were the live oak trees, cottonwood, tulip-poplar, and magnolia; there were also apple, and peach trees; plums, cherries and apricots, which gave bloom as well as fruit. Holly trees were planted in clumps, while a few handsome mimosas lent color and fragrance.

Along the bank of the river, cedars were planted at intervals. Near the flower-beds on the green in the rear of the house were many crepe myrtles; there, too, grew altheas, lilacs, bridal-wreath, snow-balls, smoke trees and yuccas. Fig bushes and pomegranates were also cultivated successfully in this old garden. Modern experts in landscape-gardening and planting might take lessons from this Virginia gentlewoman of the nineteenth century.

The second feature lay in the fact that in planting her flowers, Mrs. Taliaferro massed various colors in separate beds. There was infinite variety in the coloring of the borders, but each bed displayed a mass of bloom of the same color. She used, in great profusion, every sort of flower known in that day, and arranged them with such exquisite taste that the resulting harmony in color and form constituted the glory of the Belleville garden.

Among the flowers were the following; snowdrops, crocus, daffodils of many varieties. The small purple and tall white and purple iris, tulips, cowslips, narcissi, violets, lilies of the valley, and the single white hyacinth grew in great profusion in the borders. Mignonette, heliotrope, four-o'clocks, lady-slippers, and blue Canterbury bells came year after year. The larger varieties of lilies were there with stocks and hollyhocks for background, while many roses flourished in the mild climate, especially the musk rose, the salmon-tea, and the microphylla. Geraniums were used in the beds; in the large rustic baskets, too, and in the autumn, chrysanthemums and other late flowers bloomed often as late as Christmas. Periwinkle covered what might have been bare spaces, and over the numerous arbors were trained white-star jasmine, yellow jasmine, honeysuckle--white and coral--in contrast to climbing roses. And over some grapevines grew affording a deep and grateful shade.

The outer boundary of lawn and garden, which were as one as formed by the blue waters of the North River. The completed work was marked by the simplicity and harmony that belong to nature itself, arranged with a taste so remarkable that many observers who visited Belleville have left their testimony that both lawn and garden were glorious in beauty and symmetry.

Warner Taliaferro died suddenly away from Belleville. His wife grieved no farewell word between them had been possible. Strong in faith, she prayed often and fervently that he might appear and speak to her. The prayer was answered. The letter giving an account of the vision and of the words her husband had spoken were published in the 'Southern Churchman'.

At the death of Warner Taliaferro in November of 1877, Belleville passed to his wife, Leah Seddon, and at her death to his eldest son, Major General William Booth Taliaferro. General Taliaferro lived at "Dunham Massie", a home built by his father for him and named after the Booth estate in England. He married Sally L. ? , and from that marriage there were seven children, to whom Belleville passed jointly at the death of their parents.

In 1902, the remaining Taliaferro's sold Belleville to A. A. Elow and Jennie Goodell Elow. Mr. Elow was a wealthy mining engineer and the Elow family used Belleville as a summer home, sometimes not visiting for years at a time. When the Elows bought Belleville, it was in a state of direpair, but during their ownership, they changed Belleville from a small cottage to an imposing home. During this time, the brick wing was raised to two stories. The fireplace on the north end of the brick wing was replaced by a door and side windows and transom, and a new fireplace was added on the east wall of the living room with another fireplace directly above on the second floor. A porch was wrapped around the three exterior sides of the brick wing with a 'summer dining room' to the right of the front door. The present window in the second floor landing was the location of a door to the Balustraded porch on the second floor. On that end of the house facing the river, a large pillared portico with long brick steps was added. The roof was extended to form a pediment of the columns. The porch on the east side of the house was removed and the door leading out to it was changed to a window. The old windows with nine over nine panes were replaced by six over two pane windows. On the inside, large golden oak beams were added to the living room, which was expanded to include the entire first floor of the brick wing. The story is that Mr. Elow employed an architect from Norfolk to renovate the house while he was on an African safari. The architect ripped out the old walnut paneling in the first floor brick wing rooms and burned it on the front lawn. He replaced it with the more

popular golden oak beams and woodwork. On Mr. Blow's return from Africa, he instructed the boat captain to sail down the North River to "The most beautiful house on the river," and the captain, following his orders, moored at "Elmington", a similarly pillared house farther up the river. Blow also added the dining room and library and second floor rooms of the last frame addition. From the library to the old kitchen he added a porte cochere. Besides the main porch, Mr. Blow also added porches on the south facade of the frame wing. His taste for ships and safaris was evident in the decoration of the house at this time. According to Mrs. Thomas, Belleville's next owner, the living room reminded one of a ship's hold and sleeping accommodations were placed in every conceivable place in the house. The old kitchen, which Mr. Blow used as a billiard room was decorated with African spears and hunting trophies from his hunts, including a room length snake skin.

In 1930, Dr. Harold and Ruth Patterson Thomas purchased Belleville from the Blows. The Thomases removed the large porches that Mr. Blow had added to the brick wing and also the pillared portico. They built a simple covered entry over the west door of the brick wing and added a small screened porch where the grand portico had been. The Thomases also removed the porte cochere. During their ownership, the Thomases undertook the renovation of the old kitchen and made it into a guest house. The old structure was gutted down to the brick walls and then entirely rebuilt with new woodwork and paneling on the inside. The large brick chimney was carefully repaired where a vine had pulled it from the house. They joined the assorted buildings and additions under one roof with a columned porch running along the east side. The old brick chimney, which at one time could hold seven men standing shoulder to shoulder, was made smaller. The Thomases were also responsible for the addition of heating and the total replacement of the plumbing pipes. Mrs. Thomas was an unusually progressive woman who had a great concern for the environment and for conservation. She planted the tall row of poplars on the back lawn as well as many of the other trees. She was especially proud of the magnolia that she raised from cones and then planted about the grounds. She is also responsible for the reforestation

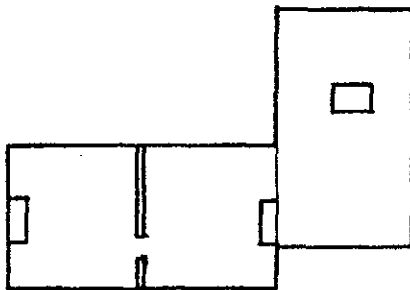
of much of Belleville's lands. While there, Mrs. Thomas had two windmills erected to pump the water from the wells and thus save energy.

In 1941, the Thomases sold Belleville to Mr. and Mrs. Wesley C. Morck. During their ownership, they made few changes to the house and grounds. They must have repaired the front porch, changing the hip roof for a flat roof with a balustrade. They replaced the old windows in the living room with six over six pane windows. A small parking area was added to the front drive. At one point in their ownership, when the main house was in a poor state of repair, plans were made to destroy the main house and add to the guest house to make it a complete, modern home. However, these plans were never carried out.

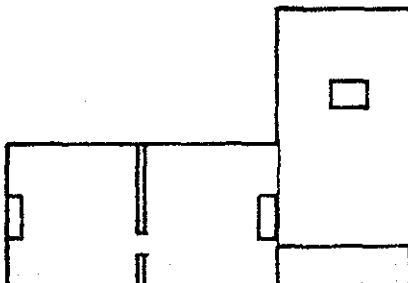
In 1972, Action-Olds Cadillac purchased Belleville from the Morcks. The Joe S. Williams family resides there and are in the process of returning the house to a good condition.



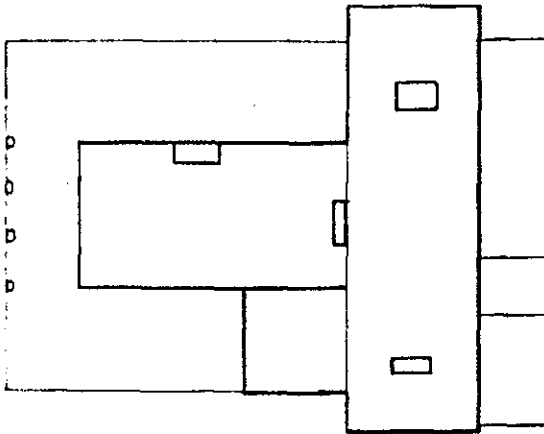
1600's 1½ story brick cottage



1700's 1 story frame added



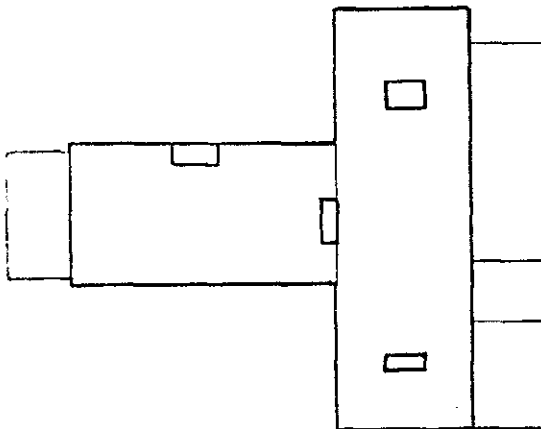
1805-1815 frame raised
to 2 stories



1902-1930

brick raised to
2 stories, porch added
all around with pillared
portico

2 story frame
extended



1930-1941

large porch removed,
replaced by simple end
porch

A. General Statement

Belleville is a T-shaped brick house with a frame addition two stories in height. Both the brick and frame portions have brick foundations and are covered with slate roofs.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions. The overall dimensions of the brick wing are 43'-3" by 21'-3". The overall dimensions of the frame wing are 65'-9" by 19'-5". The overall dimensions of the total house are 65'-9" by 62'-8".
2. Foundations. All the foundations in both the brick and frame wings are brick. There is a water table line around the brick portion.
3. Wall construction. The thickness of the walls in the brick wing suggest double brick construction. They are approximately 1'-7 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". They are flemish bond that changes to common bond on the forty-second course. The exterior finish on the brick is white paint. The frame addition is of frame construction with 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " horizontal wood siding.
4. Porches. There are existing screen porches(not shown in measured drawings) located off the living room (facing the river), the kitchen(on the south), and the library. The porches located off the kitchen and library are of wooden construction including wood board floors that are painted. The front porch off the living room is of wooden construction with a brick floor in a herring-bone pattern. The porch off the kitchen is two stories in height with an entrance on the second level from the upstairs hall. Stairs connect the two levels.
5. Chimneys. There are four interior brick chimneys in the house. There are two in the living room. One, located on the east wall, serves two working fireplaces. One is in the living room and one is directly above on the second floor. The other chimney is located on the joint between the brick and frame structures. On the interior, the chimney is completely sealed off. There is an interior

chimney located on the dining and library wall. This chimney serves a fireplace in the dining room and the library which are still in working order. The fireplaces in the bedrooms directly above are now sealed off. The last chimney is located in the kitchen and back room wall. There are fireplaces located in the backroom and the bedrooms above but these are no longer used. The fireplace in the kitchen is sealed off.

6. Openings. The doors in the house are solid, panel doors with the exception of a few which have glass on the upper half. The two living room doors are of identical size and similar style. This suggests that the door opening to the porch which is relatively modern might have been the door that opened onto a former porch opposite the present front door. The living room door to the porch and the door in the back room both have transoms above. In the brick portion of the house, in the living room, there are deep window seats in all the windows which are six over six pane windows. None of the windows in this part of the house are original. They were probably put in by either the Thomases or the Morcks. The windows located in the kitchen and back room and the bedrooms above are the oldest in the house. Downstairs, they are nine over nine pane windows and above, six over six pane windows. In these windows, you can see the bubbles of the old glass.
7. Roof. All the roofs are covered with slate. There is a gable roof over the brick portion of the house with a slope of 33°. The frame portion has a hip roof with the same slope.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans. The first floor of the brick wing contains the living room alone. The stairs go up from this room to the second floor. The first floor of the frame wing contains the dining room, the kitchen, a back room, and the library. The second floor of the brick wing contains one bedroom with its own bath

and an upstairs landing. The second floor of the frame wing contains four bedrooms, two baths, and a hall that leads to the stairs coming up from the back porch. There are no finished attics in the house. The attic over the brick has a partial floor while the frame attic is shallower and completely unfinished. Access to the attic is an opening in the ceiling on the second floor stair landing.

2. Flooring. All the rooms have wood plank floors with the exception of the kitchen, the back room, and the bathrooms which have asphalt tile. Most of the plank floors in the house are 2 1/2" pine boards of random length. There are older plank floors in the older portion of the frame wing. This includes the two bedrooms over the kitchen and back room and also the hall leading to the back stairs. These floors are wide pine boards 7"-8" wide of random length. The dining room has wide random length pine boards taken from an old church in Matthews. They are 5"-6" wide.
3. Wall and ceiling finish. All the interior walls and ceilings are plaster on wood lath. Many of the rooms where the plaster is bad have been papered over.
4. Doors. All interior doors are solid panel doors.
5. Trim. In the living room in the brick portion, six inch molding frames the windows and doors. There is also deep wood cornices and baseboards in this room and nonstructural beams span the width of the room. The dining room also has deep cornices and baseboard.
6. Hardware. All the hardware is generally thought to be relatively new and of this century. It is brass plated iron except for a few exceptions of iron ones.
7. Lighting. The house has electric lighting. There are only a few overhead fixtures and the only one of notable quality is a reproduction pewter chandelier in the dining room.
8. Heating. The house is heated with steam radiator heat.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This class project was undertaken by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Associate Professor of Architecture, by Susan Dornbusch, Maureen Fox, and Katherine Williams, Architecture students. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.